

The Monthly Update

May 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of the Monthly Update contains the schedule of your annual conferences as to when and where they will take place. As mentioned previously, the delegates to the United Methodist General Conference will be elected at each of these annual conferences. We ask that you pray about the spiritual character of these people.

Mothers' Day is coming up on May 13th – the second Sunday in the month. In recognition of this, "Focus on the Family" - the ministry based in Colorado that has done so much good to promote family values – sent me their webpage that read -

"Celebrating Mom - Her Love & Sacrifice"

In the information that appeared on this webpage, was a tribute to mothers:

"Did you see the major motion picture 'The Passion of the Christ'? In a single moment – without words - we witnessed all that it is to be a mother. Mary, overwrought with anguish, locks eyes with her son on the cross. In that exchange one can sense both the unconditional love and the grief of loss they share, and we marvel at Jesus and Mary's faithfulness as they concede to the Father's will. Children are a gift from God, but no doubt about it, parenting can be challenging.

As Mother's day approaches, we often reflect on the impact and sacrifice given freely by our own mother...."

And it concluded with..."the honorable badge of 'Mom'"

We all have cherished memories of things that our mothers have done for us. One such memory was penned this way:

"I did not have my mother long, but she cast over me an influence which has lasted all my life. The good effects of her early training I can never lose. If it had not been for her appreciation and her faith in me at a critical time in my experience, I should never likely have become an inventor. I was always a careless boy, and with a mother of different mental caliber, I should have turned out badly. But her firmness, her sweetness, her goodness were potent powers to keep me in the right path. My Mother was the making of me."

And who was this "inventor"? I am sure that you have heard of -- Thomas Edison.

Take time on this special day to show appreciation to your mother for all that she has done for you.

And may I say that we appreciate so much the support you provide - both prayerfully and financially. Please pray that The United Methodist Church would continue to be faithful to the orthodox Christian faith as we in Concerned Methodists work toward the General Conference next year in Fort Worth, Texas.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

May 2007 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

The Good Stuff

+ *Methodist Peace Award Goes to Nigerian Leader*

Sunday Mbang, prelate emeritus of the Methodist Church of Nigeria, will be presented the World Methodist Award this week. Criteria for the award include courage, creativity, and consistency in one's efforts as a peacemaker, seeking justice and reconciliation in the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Past recipients include Jimmy Carter (1985); Nelson Mandela (2000); and Boris Trajkovski (2002), then president of Macedonia. Mbang is credited with helping to bring together a divided church after his election as the second prelate in 1984. He also served as an advisor to other nations in conflict. According to the World Methodist Council, his leadership "enabled Christians and Muslims in Nigeria to live together in peace." In 2001, Mbang became chair of the World Methodist Council. The current chair, John Barrett, will present the peace award on April 24.

- As reported in *NewScope*, April 27, 2007.

+ *National Day of Prayer: "AMERICA, UNITE IN PRAYER" - Millions Will Gather to Honor God*

On Thursday, May 3, America will observe the 56th annual National Day of Prayer. Please plan to participate in this vitally important event! Proclamations from President George W. Bush and the governors of all 50 states will herald this landmark day, as the fervent prayers of millions of Americans in church events and public venues from coast to coast are offered to the Lord.

This year's theme, "America, Unite in Prayer," comes from the promise the Lord gave us in 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV): "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

We hope this powerful promise will not only serve as a catalyst to encourage God's people—people like you—to take prayer for our nation seriously, but that it will draw all believers closer together as we intercede corporately on behalf of our country.

I truly believe God is calling His people to be faithful for such a time as this. If you would like more information on how you might unite with your fellow believers and citizens to intercede on behalf of our great nation, I invite you to visit the National Day of Prayer Web site.

<http://links.mail-family.org/ctt?kn=2&m=835154&r=MjQzNzM1NTc4OQS2&b=0&j=MjcyNjQ4NzkS1&mt=1>

Blessings!

Shirley Dobson, Chairman National Day of Prayer Task Force

The Annual Conferences

When United Methodists around the world gather this spring and summer, electing delegates to worldwide and jurisdictional conferences for 2008 will top most agendas. Meeting this year at annual conferences, United Methodists across the globe also will worship together, examine issues facing the church, approve budgets, receive reports from conference boards and agencies, review ministries, pass resolutions and adopt policy and programs of mission and ministry. The church has 10 million members worldwide.

The 63 U.S. conferences, meeting during May and June, will elect 352 clergy delegates and 352 lay delegates to the denomination's highest legislative body, the General Conference. Convened every four years, the conference will meet April 23-May 2, 2008, in Fort Worth, Texas. The 53 conferences in Europe, Africa and the Philippines will elect 274 delegates. An additional 10 delegates from Concordant Methodist churches also will attend.

The annual (sometimes called regional) conference is the "basic unit" of the church, according to the denomination's Book of Discipline. It may include an entire state, part of a state or even parts of two or more states. There are also three missionary conferences in the United States, which rely on the denomination for funding.

The number of delegates to the General Conference is subject to change after the denomination's supreme court, called the Judicial Council, convenes April 25-28 in the Philippines. The meeting in Manila will be the first time a United Methodist Judicial Council has met outside the United States. Depending on actions taken by the Judicial Council, General Conference delegates may take further action relative to the admission of the Methodist Church of the African nation of Cote d'Ivoire as an annual conference, a decision made by the 2004 legislative session.

The delegates also may consider a recommendation proposing that the United States become a Central Conference. The proposal introduced to the United Methodist Council of Bishops last November would end the current system that splits the United States from the central conferences that govern the church outside the United States and would revise the United Methodist Book of Discipline into a "truly general book of doctrine, mission and discipline, deleting all portions that apply only to the United States." The five existing U.S. jurisdictional conferences would exist within one U.S. Central Conference, putting it on par with the central conferences already in existence. If approved, the changes would take effect in 2012.

The annual conferences will elect delegates to the five U.S. jurisdictional conferences, which will be held in July 2008 to elect bishops and assign them to geographic areas for the next four years. The 1,408 clergy and lay delegates to the jurisdictional conferences will elect nine U.S. bishops, and the Central Conferences will elect three bishops.

During the annual conference gatherings in the United States, Africa, Europe and the Philippines, one-year appointments of all conference clergy members will be announced, new deacons and elders ordained, and candidates for ordination approved. A bishop will preside over each annual session.

In addition to electing delegates, annual conferences will act on petitions from individuals and groups wanting to change policies, procedures and practices of The United Methodist Church. Approved petitions will be submitted to the General Conference, and those that are adopted will be included in the 2008 revision of the Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions. General Conference delegates can change anything in the Book of Discipline except the church's Constitution. Any recommended changes in the Constitution must be ratified by the annual conferences. Individual and group petitions must be postmarked by Oct. 26, which is 180 days before the opening day of the General Conference. Petitions secretary for the 2008 conference is Gary W. Graves, pastor of Beaver Dam (Ky.) United Methodist Church. Instructions for filing petitions are available at www.GC2008.umc.org.

The first session of 2007 conference gatherings will be the Northeast Philippines, scheduled for Feb. 22-25. The 63 regional U.S. gatherings will begin May 2-5 when the Troy Annual Conference convenes in Burlington, Vt., and will conclude June 24 with the adjournment of the California-Pacific Annual Conference in Redlands, Calif. Some annual conferences outside the United States meet in the fall and winter.

Annual conference meeting dates and places are:

U.S. ANNUAL CONFERENCES

North Central Jurisdiction

Dakotas, June 6-9, Sioux Falls, S.D.
Detroit, May 17-20, Adrian, Mich.
East Ohio, June 18-21, Lakeside, Ohio
Illinois Great Rivers, June 6-9, Peoria, Ill.
Iowa, June 6-10, Ames, Iowa
Minnesota, May 29-June 1, Saint Cloud, Minn.
North Indiana, May 31-June 2, West Lafayette, Ind.
Northern Illinois, June 9-12, Saint Charles, Ill.
South Indiana, June 6-9, Bloomington, Ind.
West Michigan, May 31-June 3, Grand Rapids, Mich.
West Ohio, June 10-14, Lakeside, Ohio
Wisconsin, June 10-13, Middleton, Wis.

Northeastern Jurisdiction

Baltimore-Washington, May 24-26, Washington, D.C.
Central Pennsylvania, June 6-9, Grantham, Pa.
Eastern Pennsylvania, June 13-15, Philadelphia
Greater New Jersey, May 30-June 2, Valley Forge, Pa.
New England, June 7-10, Wenham, Mass.
New York, June 6-9, Hempstead, N.Y.
North Central New York, June 1-3, Liverpool, N.Y.
Peninsula-Delaware, June 8-10, Princess Anne, Md.
Troy, May 2-5, Burlington, Vt.
West Virginia, June 7-10, Buckhannon, W. Va.
Western New York, June 8-10, Buffalo, N.Y.
Western Pennsylvania, June 7-10, Grove City, Pa.

Wyoming, May 31-June 2, Scranton, Pa.

South Central Jurisdiction

Arkansas, June 10-13, Russellville, Ark.
Central Texas, June 3-6, Fort Worth, Texas
Kansas East, June 6-9, Baldwin City, Kan.
Kansas West, May 23-25, Hutchinson, Kan.
Louisiana, June 3-6, Baton Rouge, La.
Missouri, June 1-4, Springfield, Mo.
Nebraska, June 6-9, Lincoln, Neb.
New Mexico, June 6-9, Glorieta, N.M.
North Texas, June 3-6, Plano, Texas
Northwest Texas, May 28-31, Midland, Texas
Oklahoma, May 27-31, Oklahoma City.
Oklahoma Indian Missionary, June 7-10, Preston, Okla.
Rio Grande, May 31-June 2, Abilene, Texas
Southwest Texas, June 6-9, Corpus Christi, Texas
Texas, May 27-31, The Woodlands, Texas

Southeastern Jurisdiction

Alabama-West Florida, June 3-6, Montgomery, Ala.
Florida, June 6-9, Lakeland, Fla.
Holston, June 10-13, Lake Junaluska, N.C.
Kentucky, June 11-15, Louisville, Ky.
Memphis, June 3-6, Jackson, Tenn.
Mississippi, June 10-14, Jackson, Miss.
North Alabama, June 1-2, Argo, Ala.
North Carolina, June 13-17, Greenville, N.C.
North Georgia, June 11-15, Athens, Ga.
Red Bird Missionary, May 11-12, Frankes, Ky.
South Carolina, June 3-7, Florence, S.C.
South Georgia, June 3-7, Savannah, Ga.
Tennessee, June 10-13, Brentwood, Tenn.
Virginia, June 10-13, Roanoke, Va.
Western North Carolina, June 7-10, Lake Junaluska, N.C.

Western Jurisdiction

Alaska Missionary, May 25-27, Anchorage, Alaska
California-Nevada, June 19-24, Sacramento, Calif.
California-Pacific, June 20-24, Redlands, Calif.
Desert Southwest, June 7-10, Scottsdale, Ariz.
Oregon-Idaho, June 12-16, Salem, Ore.
Pacific Northwest, June 12-16, Tacoma, Wash.
Rocky Mountain, June 13-16, Denver, Colo.
Yellowstone, June 7-10, Billings, Mont.

CENTRAL JURISDICTION (OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES) CONFERENCES

(Complete information on some conferences is unavailable.)

Austria Provisional, May 17-21, Linz, Austria
Bicol Philippines Provisional, March 15-18, Daet, Camarines Norte, Philippines
Bulgaria Provisional, Sept. 13-16, Dobric, Bulgaria
Central Congo, Katako-Kombe, Democratic Republic of Congo
Central Luzon Philippines, March 29-April 1, Guimba, Nueva Ecija, Philippines
Central Russia, June 22-24, Moscow
Czech & Slovak Republics, May 10-13, Prague-Nove Mesto, Czech Republic

Denmark, June 27-July 1, Strandby, Denmark
 East Africa, Africa University, Mutare, Zimbabwe
 East Congo, Kindu, Democratic Republic of Congo
 East Mindanao Philippines, April 19-22, Obrero, Davao City, Philippines
 Eastern Russia and Central Asia Provisional, May 18-20, Ekaterinburg, Russia
 Estonia, May 30-31, Tallinn, Estonia
 Finland-Finnish-speaking Provisional, July 4-8, Finland
 Finland-Swedish-speaking Provisional, June 7-10, Grankulla, Finland
 Germany East, May 30-June 3, Zwickau, Saxonia, Germany
 Germany North, May 9-13, Braunfels, Germany
 Germany South, June 21-24, Oehringen & Sporthalle Boeblingen, Germany
 Hungary, April 11-14, Budapest, Hungary
 Liberia, Niva County, Liberia
 Mindanao Philippines, May 10-13, Kidapawan City, Philippines
 North Central Philippines, March 1-4, Cauayan, Isabela, Philippines
 North of Save River (Northern Mozambique), Beira, Sofala, Mozambique
 Northeast Luzon Philippines, May 24-27, Echague, Isabela, Philippines
 Northeast Philippines, Feb. 22-25, Saguday, Quirino, Philippines
 Northern Philippines, May 31-June 3, Sanchez Mira, Cagayan, Philippines
 Northwest Mindanao Philippines, April 12-15, Laguistas, Malaybalay, Philippines
 Northwest Philippines, April 12-15, Salcedo, Ilocos Sur, Philippines
 Northwest Russia Provisional, July 6-8, Saint Petersburg, Russia
 Norway, June 21-24, Porsgrunn, Norway
 Oriental & Equator, Kisangani, Democratic Republic of Congo
 Pangasinan Philippines, March 15-18, Dagupan City, Pangasinan, Philippines
 Poland, June 14-17, Klarysew, Poland
 Serbia-Macedonia Provisional, Oct. 10-14, Kisac, Serbia.
 South Russia Provisional, May 25-27, Voronezh, Russia
 South of Save River (Southern Mozambique), Maputo, Mozambique
 Sweden, May 16-20, Norrkoping, Sweden
 Switzerland-France, June 7-10, Zofingen, Switzerland
 Tarlac Philippines, May 17-20, Tarlac City, Philippines
 Ukraine & Moldova Provisional, June 28-July 1, Kiev, Ukraine
 Visayas Philippines, March 22-25, Jaro, Iloilo City, Philippines
 West Congo, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

- Report by Linda Green, United Methodist News Services (UMNS); Jan. 31, 2007.

Life Issues.

+ Supreme Court Triumph on PBA[Partial Birth Abortion]!

[Note; We in Concerned Methodists applaud this decision by the Supreme Court. For anyone who has questions about the abortion issue, it would be best to see what is being discussed by viewing the results first hand, by pictures, or by drawings. The procedure known as "Partial Birth Abortion" is barbaric in the extreme. This decision is long overdue.]

Those who cherish life rejoice in the news that the Supreme Court no longer endorses the senseless killing of innocent, partially-born babies. In a week where the effects of violence have been so keenly felt, we applaud the U.S. Supreme Court's decision today upholding Congress's statute that ends the bloodshed of the unborn by the horrific partial-birth abortion procedure. The U.S. Supreme Court's vote in today's case was 5-4. We insist that this matter should not be in the Court, for it is not in the Constitution that was written by our Founders. However, at least now the Court is beginning to grant that the people, through their elected representatives, have a say in this matter. Writing for the majority, Justice

Anthony Kennedy (joined by Chief Justice John Roberts, and Justices Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas, and Antonin Scalia) upheld a principle that was established in Planned Parenthood v. Casey--the state has a legitimate interest in protecting unborn human life. The opinion also seems to indicate that the Court is rethinking the way in which challenges are brought by the abortion lobby to every statute affecting abortions. For years, the abortion lobby has been able to stop almost all legislation by "facial challenges." Now, perhaps, they will have to prove their case in court, as everyone else

has to do. For FRC, this rare gleam of sanity in the abortion debate is a long-awaited triumph, marked by years of hard work on Capitol Hill, in legal briefs, through congressional testimony, and countless publications aimed at educating Americans on the importance of protecting life and helping mothers. We can hope, and pray, that this Supreme Court majority will, in subsequent cases, continue to recognize, ever more effectively, the interest of the people in protecting mothers and their children in the womb.

- E-mail received from the Family Research Council, April 18, 2007.

+ **'Don't Become Overcome by Evil'**

As the Virginia Tech community mourned and grieved for its own, our nation's leaders sat among them, taking on a consoling role that Americans have had need of all too often. Yesterday's convocation, which packed the 10,000-seat Cassell Coliseum, sought to bring some healing to a campus still suffering shock and disbelief at the tragedy. In his speech, Governor Tim Kaine (D) pointed to the example of the Bible's Job. "[It's] one of the most powerful stories in human history...[Job was] afflicted with all kinds of tragedies and health [problems]. And...he was angry at his circumstances and he was angry at his Creator. He argued with God. But he didn't lose his faith... Despair is a natural emotion at a time like this. [We remember] those haunting words that were uttered on a hill in Calvary, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" As the enormity of this heartbreak sets in, we all continue to lift up the campus--and the country--to the Lord, asking that the peace that passes understanding calm the minds and spirits of those left behind.

- E-mail received from the Family Research Council, April 18, 2007.

(UM) Bishops. AMID CONTROVERSY, The United Methodist Church's Council of Bishops Gather

[Note: The Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) is one of the ministries doing great work in informing the laity of what is happening and working for renewal in the United Methodist Church. We are co-laborers in this struggle. – AOM]

Washington, DC- Mark Tooley, Executive Director of IRD's UMAction Committee will be available in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina for comment during the United Methodist Council of Bishops gathering. Tooley's UMAction Briefing reaches over 440,000 United Methodists. The bishops preside over 11 million church members in the United States, Africa, Europe and the Philippines. Their denomination is divided over hot button issues like homosexuality, with U.S. bishops being more liberal, and overseas bishops more conservative. Some bishops are developing a proposal that would divide the U.S. church from the overseas churches. IRD/UMAction supports a conservative perspective that affirms traditional church teachings.

What: The United Methodist Church's Council of Bishops Gathering

Who: All 69 active United Methodist bishops and 92 retired United Methodist bishops

Where: Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

When: Sunday, April 29 thru Sunday, May 6

Mark Tooley, Director of IRD's UM Action Committee, commented:

"The Associated Press recently reported that, 'As United Methodists debate how they should interpret Scripture on issues from salvation to sexual orientation, delegates from overseas will be a steadfast conservative voice in the fight'. We pray that the African bishops especially, along with orthodox bishops in the U.S. and elsewhere, will work together to ensure that United Methodism does not follow the disastrous path of the Episcopal Church on theological and sexuality issues."

The Institute on Religion and Democracy, founded in 1981, is an ecumenical alliance of U.S. Christians working to reform their churches' social witness, in accord with biblical and historic Christian teachings, thereby contributing to the renewal of democratic society at home and abroad.

- Lorelei Coyle, *The Institute on Religion and Democracy*; 202-682-4131. Received by E-mail; lcoble@ird-renew.org

Of Interest.

+ **UMC Membership Declines -Statistics**": UM membership in the United States has been dropping....So says the new report by the General Council on Finance and Administration unveiled by General Secretary Sandra Lackore at last week's UM town hall. According to the report entitled "This Is Our Story," U.S. membership has dropped more than 19% from 1974 to 2005. At the same time, attendance as percentage of membership has increased from 36% in 1974 to nearly 42% in 2005. In other words, attendance has not dropped as fast as membership, and at times during those two decades it has risen. Professions and restorations of faith are more than 51% of new members today. About half of those are from confirmation classes, whereas 78% were from confirmation classes in 1975. While larger churches bring in more new members, they have about the same number of professions of faith as the smallest UM churches. The largest churches are better at bringing in new members transferring from another church.

The church outside the United States makes up one-third of the total UM membership. This non-U.S. membership has grown 177% in the last ten years, or 223% if you include the addition of more than 677,000 members in Côte d'Ivoire. The number of local churches outside the United States has grown by 86% since 1995, and the number of ordained clergy has grown by almost 83%. In closing the report, GCFA came back to the figure that 41% of U.S. churches did not have a single new member by profession of faith or restoration. "There is much out there for us to do," the report says.

- As reported in *NewScope*, April 27, 2007.

+ **Volunteers are being sought** to serve as marshals or pages at the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas, April 23-May 2, 2008. About 150 volunteers are needed, conference planners say. The General Conference depends on volunteers for everything from assisting disabled delegates to distributing documents. Marshals and pages travel to and work at the conference at their own expense. Volunteers may apply online by going to <<http://gc2008.umc.org>> and clicking the volunteer link under Resources. Applications must be submitted by July 31, and applicants will be notified of their status by Sept. 30.

- *UMNS*, as reported in *NewScope*, April 27, 2007.

+ **Asian American Congregations Show Outreach Potential:** As congregations grow and reach new populations, many studies have shown that they tend to be multicultural. In a recent study of Asian American churches, the Leadership Network found that 79% have at least 10% non-Asians in attendance and 61% of them have plans to plant new churches. They do not just have intent to start new churches, but 31% have already begun them. Mission is a strong part of who they are, with 84% sending out short-term teams, 74% giving financial support to missionaries, and 61% sending out career missionaries. When asked what is going well in their churches, the surveyed churches pointed to small groups, worship, and missions. Though missions are stronger in churches with more than 250 persons in attendance, small groups are stronger in the smaller churches. Churches with less than 50% first-generation Asian immigrants and those that are English-only congregations also do better with small groups. There are approximately 60,000 Korean American UMs in 310 U.S. churches, according to Keihwan Ryoo, editor of a Korean-language magazine.

- *NewScope*, April 27, 2007.

* * * * *

"While I have met many former homosexuals, I have yet to meet a former black."

- *Martin Luther King Jr.'s niece, Alveta Scott King*

Global Outlook

The courageous are often in the minority, but they secure a place in history. – Zig Ziglar

* * * * *

Mozambique, Church Responds to Food Shortage in Mozambique

A severe food shortage in Mozambique caused by Cyclone Favio and its after-effects has been eased with emergency food supplies and other gifts from UMs in the African nation and the United States. Nevertheless, church leaders say the needs for food, shelter, and medical assistance are still far beyond what various organizations are providing. Rita Choquico Quimbine, pastor of Nhapele UMC, lost her home and her bicycle in the storm. The Inhambane North District was "reduced to extreme poverty" by the Feb. 22 cyclone and subsequent rains, according to Ana Maria Francisco, superintendent. Francisco is grateful that UMs in Mozambique, with support from the Missouri Conference, have distributed March 10-12 essential food supplies, including rice, beans, cornmeal, cooking oil, soap, and sugar.

At least nine UM parsonages and church buildings were destroyed in the cyclone and its aftermath. A permanent chapel under construction for Inhassoro UMC will need to be rebuilt from scratch, according to Jose Jaime Joaquim, pastor. Cyclone victims in the remote village of Chibo wait for delivery of drinking water. At Chibo UMC, the chapel is collapsed, and a small clinic providing health assistance for the community is gone, Francisco said.

- *Antonio Wilson, UMC in Mozambique (UMNS)*, as reported in *NewScope*, April 27, 2007.

* * * * *

When two elephants are fighting the ant should step aside. – Cambodian proverb